1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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some termed his "Haitianization." There were those who expressed surprise at the occurrence, but the majority held that though this man had himself been a devout follower of the Church, and his parents before him, Damballa was a *loa* of his family, and therefore it was reasonable that it should come to him when called at a dance.

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Another "unauthorized" possession, that of a woman in mourning, was also witnessed. Like the *service* of one night's duration, which this dance followed, it was but poorly organized and provided for, and in this it reflected the status of the family, which had but few resources, since its head had recently come into the valley and therefore lacked the backing which only his own relationship group could give him. Here there was no *maison de servitude*, and the *tonnelle* had been erected in an open field where the only shelter was offered by a crude hut near by. The *hungan* did not appear until late, while the host lived up to his reputation by drinking more *clairin* than was good for him. None the less, one violent possession by a *loa boussl* occurred relatively early in the evening, though the *loa* concerned did not "announce himself" through the song of the one he had possessed.

The woman in mourning sang continuously as she sat among the spectators, and since she was not supposed to dance, she executed dance movements in place. As the drumming became more and more *chaud* — "hot" — she became correspondingly more excited until, suddenly leaping from her seat, she began a frenzied dance. She refused the water and candle, however, and when finished with her dancing, she fell exhausted into her chair, where she remained in a coma during the next hour. She roused herself later and again joined the singing, but though she was near possession, this never came on. Her *loa*, like the other *loa boussl* that came earlier in the evening, did not "announce itself," and since it was her first — and not unwelcome — possession, she stated that at the termination of her period of mourning she would

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have a *hungan* divine its identity so that she might thereafter worship it and be under its protection. As in the other case discussed, the personality involved here is not without interest. The woman was one of the shrewdest traders in the Mirebalais market, and noted for her hardness. Underneath this, however, the presence of much vital energy could be felt as well as a passionate desire for gayety and attention from members of the other sex. That the essential lack of satisfaction of these drives in her life, as discussed and observed, figured in bringing on her possession cannot be doubted, and, as such, throws significant light on the nature of the psychological aspects of the phenomenon.

These instances, however, must not be thought of as a regular part of the ritual of the dances. Though a dance was attended almost every Saturday night during the course of an entire summer, and a number of *services* and other *vodun* rites in addition, these were the only occasions when a *loa boussi* appeared. In order, therefore, to document the pattern of the *vodun* dance that has already been given, some of the dances witnessed may be described in outline.

The first of these is a dance which, originally intended as the culmination of the *service* described in the preceding chapter, failed to fulfill its end because of a quarrel between two important members of the family. None the less, it proved to be one of the most spirited and typical dances witnessed. The habitation, when reached shortly after six o'clock, was deserted, except for a few people who seemed to be waiting disconsolately. Among them were several *hounsi* in white, and two who carried banners, while the three drums, each "dressed" in its skirt-like covering, stood before the entrance, the drumsticks and the *agwe* lying on the *barriere* itself. Since the *hungan* had not arrived, one or two of the men present took charge as darkness came on. Before this dance began, it was necessary to introduce the drums ceremonially into the compound, and as this was the first *vodun* dance after the ce-

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764 balais the setting was most elaborate, in striking contrast to the bareness of the rites for a young man who was a *'ti moun* in a town family and came from poor peasant folk in the hills. Whatever the type of funeral, the coffin, carried by four men, leaves the house of death preceded by the priest and his acolytes. After mass has been sung, the priest and mourners walk in procession to the graveyard, where the body is placed in a tomb if one has been prepared for it, or interred underground, awaiting the building of a tomb. Before his death, should a person in a quarrel decree that certain others must never touch his coffin, and should these for the sake of public opinion attempt to carry it, it is believed that the coffin will fall to the ground. Such occurrences are extremely rare and cause a great deal of gossip. Following the funeral, friends sometimes remain with the mourners for several days, caring for the house and doing the cooking; otherwise the women of the household are obliged to take up their work at once. The trench which held the body during the washing is filled in as soon as the corpse is taken from the house, and a smudge of orange leaves is made "to take away the odor of death." Objects employed in the last illness, such as the mat on which the body lay and the towel used to dry the corpse, are taken to a large river and washed, after which they may be used by the heirs, provided death did not result from a contagious disease. Work in the fields is also resumed a few days after the funeral, for custom does not dictate when the mourners may again take up their tasks.

765 Next in the cycle of the rituals of death is the *dernière prière*, which ends a novena.[1] It was stated that the novena must begin on the Saturday after burial, so that it might end on a Sunday night, but one such ceremony actually occurred on a Friday night, which would be in accordance with the assertion that the *dernière prière* may take place on Monday, Friday, or Saturday night. Others, however, maintained that this is only town custom, and that in the countryside this rite

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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always takes place on a Sunday. The prayers of the novena, whatever week-day they may begin, are recited either by the priest, if in town, or by a *prêt' savanne*. The family and a few friends, who gather to hear the prayers and to sing hymns, take their places about a table covered with a white cloth, on which are placed *images* of the saints, a crucifix, two candles which must burn for the nine days, and two bouquets of flowers. A lamp of oil in a glass with a floating wick must also burn day and night. Each session of the novena lasts some two hours, and no refreshments are served those who attend.

On the day of the *dernière prière* those invited come to help cover the walls of the room with white sheets — sometimes the ceiling is also covered — and hang white curtains over doors and windows. Wreaths are placed on the table and attached to the sheets on the walls, and *images* of the saints are pinned to the white table-cloth as it hangs down. Liquor, cakes, *kóla*, *clairin* and other refreshments are made ready, according to the family means, these being held so essential that if the family lacks the funds at the moment to provide them, the novena may be stopped on the eighth day, and the *dernière prière* postponed for a month or even two. The same type of song is sung at this rite as at wakes, and the mourners wail once again, though not so loudly as just after the occurrence of death. At about eleven o'clock, after having recited the last prayer of the novena, a *libera* is sung to "drive the dead from the house," since now they are through with him — followed by an *adoration* for the *prêt' savanne*. Since, unlike the custom at vodun ceremonies, these coins are his entire fee for the novena as well as for this evening's ceremony, he sees to it that the song which marks it continues until all members of the family have donated a sum that he regards adequate. The *adoration* over, the refreshments are passed, so that the *dernière prière* most often ends at midnight, though those in attendance sometimes remain until morning, playing games, telling stories, and singing canticles as at wakes.

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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gatory on those who are possessed by *loa* who go unharmed in fire, it is said: "It is the *loa* that go into the fire. The soul is another thing."

All agree that the dead do not possess folk in the manner of the *loa*, as might be expected from the fact that the most important rituals in the cult of the dead are not only dominated by the Church, but carried out by its priest. In the matter of consulting the dead when questions of importance for the family are involved, however, there is no consensus of opinion. The most widespread point of view holds that only those dead whose *loa* have not been removed from their heads can be summoned, and that this is done only to permit them to "go to God," so their souls may be at rest. Otherwise, "when the dead are called, it is a matter of magic, for the dead are never good and one always must fear them." And though a Malt' 'Bitation that is an old, old ancestor may "mount the head" of a member of the family, he would never be specially called and in most cases, if he did come, would be "restrained." On the other hand, it was recounted how during the Cacos rebellion the soul of Dessalines was brought into a jar and asked for his counsel. It is said, however, that he was so angered at the consistent defeats sustained by the Haitians that he struck everyone to earth and roundly scolded them for having lost the liberty with which he endowed them, departing without giving the desired advice. And since the spirits of Christophe and Toussaint are believed to be even stronger, no one had sufficient courage to summon them!

The immediate nature of the relation between the dead and the living is best seen in the conventions and attitudes surrounding the wearing of mourning, which is required of all children of the deceased, whether "legitimate" or otherwise. Black is worn twelve months for a father, eighteen months for a mother; and half-mourning — black and white — is worn for a sister, brother, cousin, uncle, or aunt. In the country, before full mourning is put on, the black cloth is

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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taken to the *prêt' sauvane* to be blessed with holy water; in the town the Catholic priest is said to do this. In full mourning, black is worn on Sundays, Mondays, and Fridays, the days sacred to the dead, but since full mourning means that one must be dressed in one's best and it is impossible to wear these clothes all day long even in the first weeks after death, the rule is to remain at home, fully dressed, on Sundays, Mondays, and Fridays, wearing the full mourning outside the house only to Sunday mass.

When full mourning for a parent cannot be worn immediately following death, the fulfillment of the obligation is postponed. If this duty is not ultimately met, however, the dead take vengeance, so that a child of the one who was remiss perhaps falls ill, or some other misfortune comes to him. If the negligent one is no longer living, then the penalty for his neglect will be assessed on his children, who, on consulting a diviner, will be told that they must wear mourning not only for their own parents, but for their grandparents as well. Such is the case of a dying woman whose story is recounted, for a diviner ascertained that though she had worn mourning for her own father, he had not worn it for his parent: as soon as she put on full mourning for her grandfather, she is said to have immediately recovered.

A widower wears mourning for a legally married wife for a year, and a widow for her husband during a similar period, and it is believed that if a man were to remarry before the year has elapsed, his second wife would die, so that a woman will not go sooner to a widower, while it is equally dangerous for a widow to take a husband before the first anniversary of the death of her spouse. Should a *placée* wife die, however, another may be taken in her stead before the year has passed, for it is only in matters where the Church is concerned that the dead take vengeance. Furthermore, a man who has more than one mate may go to his other wives at any time after the death of a spouse, and though he would, of course, not go to them

1: Herskovits E-4,5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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soon after the death of one for whom he had deep affection, the matter is entirely one which concerns his own feelings. If a woman who cannot afford proper mourning clothes remarries in the Church before she has discharged the obligation to wear mourning for her dead husband, gossip will be heard, but, on the other hand, a woman who has been legally married, and who therefore may not remarry for a year after her husband's death, may be taken as *placée* by another before that period has elapsed. In this case, however, she must wear full mourning and otherwise observe all the necessary rites before the other man with safety may seek the approval of the Church for the union.

76 Though children who have lived until about twelve years of age and have been baptized are given a *dernière prière* and must not be forgotten when sacrifices are made to the family dead, there is but little mourning for them. "*'Ti moun pas gagné deuilles* — Children do not merit the wearing of mourning," it is said, and they are called "*'ti z'anges* — little angels" — for they are too young to have sinned. "It is only when one makes love that the important sins begin." Therefore, if a young person dies, not only do his parents, grandparents, and older brothers and sisters not follow his coffin to the grave, but they do not mourn for him. Only those younger brothers and sisters who were of his age — twelve or thirteen years old — wear semi-mourning.

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with the corpse. He wants nothing to do with the domain of the Gòdés. He liberates himself from the corpse at the cemetery and retires "below the water." He is no longer a friend and benefactor of the family. He cannot be inherited by the children of the deceased. Such controls as the deceased once exercised over him are dissipated. He may, in fact, be angered at the treatment he has received and return only to harass the family. Thus, if a family fails to have the mait' tête of one of its members properly removed at death, it may be persecuted afterward by the "spirit" of the dead ancestor and the loa as well.

The rite of dispossessing a deceased person of his loa is called *désounin*, or *désounsé*. The essence of it is the transference of the mait' tête from the head of the dead person into a special receptacle, an earthen jar called a *govi* or *pot tête*. Sometimes it is transferred to the head of a child in the family, though usually this comes later.

There have been many descriptions of this ritual, and they seem to show that, though the tradition is a constant one, the specific patterns of the services are variable. Different regions, different cult centers, and different houngans conduct the rites in different ways.

Eugène Aubin wrote, for example:

> On the day of death, the deceased is placed standing up; the *papaloi* [houngan] conducts the rites which retire the *mystère* [loa] from the body and introduce it into a jar, which is then carefully sealed. On the ninth day, after the feast for the dead, the jar is broken and liberty given to the *loa*.[1]

Melville Herskovits reported:

> If the dead person was a Vodun priest or otherwise had strong consciousness, steps are taken . . . "to remove the *loa* from his head" so that his soul will not go under the water, for, as has been explained, such souls are held to be powerful spirits which may cause the family much harm if, after a time, an expensive and troublesome ceremony is not performed to bring them out and lodge them in a jar. . . . The *houngan* stands in place and calls the name of the dead. He puts some of the hair of the dead in the jar or in a calabash, into which the *loa* is supposed to go, and, unless another member of the family, summoned to receive the consciousness of the dead, is present, the jar or calabash is sealed until these spirits can be "given" to a successor.[2]

As Herskovits understands it, it is the "soul" of the dead person that would go to live "under the water," rather than the loa. This would appear to be a fusion of two separate elements—the wandering, troublesome "spirit" of a dead person and the mait' tête who retires "under the water." Actually, Haitians are not always consistent in their explanations of what happens, or of the difference between loa and souls. On the houngan altar there may be some govis that contain "souls" or "spirits" and others that contain loa; though the distinction is readily appreciated, Haitians are

[1] [Translated from The French of Aubin, En Haïti, P. 212
Cf. P. 350, category 116.—Analyst]

[2] [Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, pp. 213-214
Cf. P. 350, category 116. —Analyst]

S: Courlander S-6 (1827-1965) 1969 SV3 Habi SV3



beyond the obvious fear of contagion. In his study of Dahomey, Herskovits notes:

> . . . Small-pox is believed to be sent as a punishment for grave offenses in the eyes of these [the Sagbata] deities, and it is taken to indicate that either the dead person himself or a member of his family has committed some heinous crime such as the practice of black magic. A person who dies of small-pox may only be buried after permission has been given by the chief priest of the Earth cult.[38]

Thus, in Haiti, though the connections with the past are clouded, it is clear that victims of lightning and smallpox are treated as a special class of criminals or malefactors.

Ordinary malefactors such as malevolent criminals and murderers—until recent years, at least—were not buried in the common graveyard. They, too, were segregated at the periphery of the cemetery or buried at the edge of a trail or road where the traffic would not permit them to rest and where their graves would be under constant surveillance. The roadside grave sometimes was also the fate of a person killed by lightning.

That these special burials are related to the Dahomean and Yoruban concepts of retribution for crimes against the deities is supported by the similarity of treatment accorded victims of lightning and disease and common criminals. In Haiti, Herskovits observes: "Those who die of smallpox or leprosy, suicides, or persons shot as a punishment for crime are not buried in the communal cemetery, but in special sections of the graveyard," the suicides and criminals being set apart from the others.[39]

Graves found near the seashore, lake shores, or riverbanks frequently are declared to belong to persons who died of drowning.

Approximately nine days after a person's death, the "last prayers" are said, and the soul of the deceased is presumed to have departed from the house. Once more, under the tonnelle outside there are games, storytelling, and singing. On this night, however, there is also drumming and dancing of a special kind. Usually it is the Juba, or Martinique, dance, which is believed to be specially enjoyed by the dead, and it is the older people, rather than the young, who participate. These festivities are believed to give cheer to the deceased and to "encourage" him on his way. On the next night comes the manger mort, the feast for the family dead, a ritual which continues periodically through the years.

Sometimes in Haiti you may come upon an old tomb or grave before which a dish of specially prepared food has been set. This is part of the manger mort ritual.

A man may make provision in advance of his death for the rites which follow his burial. He may designate special animals to be killed, leave

[38 Ibid., pp. 397–398. Cf. p. 350, Category 116.—Ed.]
[39 Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 214. Cf. p. 350, Category 116.—Ed.]

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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the dead a right to whatever their survivors possess, and moreover gives them the right to return to earth as ghosts.[31]

Strict rules of mourning prevail, both as regards clothing and behavior. The slightest lapse in the observation of these rules would cause resentment on the part of the dead; fear of retribution would be quite enough to ensure conformity even if public opinion did not. Ghosts have the power to possess mortals, not as the loa do at a Vodun service or dance, but in the manner understood by American Negroes who say they have been "ha'nted," and so, continually thinking of the dead, live in nervous fear of a streak of bad luck. Such possession is a form of persecution, with continual consequent bad luck until the survivor has carried out all his obligations. It is especially significant, however, that a departed spirit takes vengeance only in matters thought by the Haitian to concern the Church. The ghost is not whimsical in his possession of mortals, and cannot resent treatment which is his due. The kind of treatment given a corpse depends upon the kind of death he died: a person struck by lightning, for example, would have no ceremonies at all, for lightning is an act of God.

Where the cult of the dead departs entirely from the teachings of the Church is in the matter of magic, a topic shortly to be treated. It may be briefly stated here that ghosts can be summoned back by special adepts for purposes of divination; that certain corpses are thought to be revivified by evil persons who use these soulless, pathetic automata as slaves (these are the notorious *zombis*); and that black magic—that is, powerful influence for evil—can be worked by sorcerers who know how to command ghosts.

All other articles of the Vodun creed not already discussed, except one, come under the heading of magic. That exception is the statement: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." The fact is as simple as the affirmation. If the Catholic priests fight Vodun, preaching frequently against its beliefs and practices, that is unfortunate, think the peasants: Vodun does not retaliate by fighting Catholicism. God and the saints have their province, and the loa theirs. The mind of the Haitian is simple enough to accept both sets of spiritual beings, and not philosophical enough to worry over the contradiction. Practically every Vodun worshiper thinks of himself as a Catholic.[32]

31. See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

32. In this sketch of the Vodun creed, it has been customarily emphasized that each locality has its own variations both in belief and practice. The reader who is interested in pursuing the subject further should consult the works of Price-Mars, Herskovits, Deslandes, Perrens, Hurston, et al. See Bibliography.